

Rhodora

JOURNAL OF

THE NEW ENGLAND BOTANICAL CLUB

Vol. 12.

March, 1910.

No. 135.

JANE LORING GRAY.

THE death of Mrs. Jane Loring Gray, July 29, 1909, at Beverly, Mass., must have recalled to many of the readers of RHODORA pleasant memories of the days when they were welcomed at the old house in the Botanic Garden by Mrs. Gray and her husband, Asa Gray. Although Mrs. Gray was not herself a botanist, through her sympathy with her husband in his scientific work she became acquainted with most of the American botanists of his time and, as his companion during his travels in Europe, she met many distinguished foreign botanists of the last generation as well as some of the botanical lights of a still earlier generation. Her charming manner made her everywhere welcome and to her quick appreciation of all that was worth seeing and hearing was added an excellent memory which enabled her to picture to a younger generation the personal appearance, habits and surroundings of their distinguished predecessors.

Mrs. Gray, a daughter of Mr. Charles Greely Loring, was born in Boston, Aug. 27, 1821, and first became acquainted with her future husband in 1844 while he was delivering a course of lectures at the Lowell Institute in Boston. They were married on May 4, 1848. During the rest of her long life she lived at the Botanic Garden where all botanists were received with a hospitality in which simplicity lent an added charm to cordiality, so that even the bashful and those accustomed only to a rougher mode of life felt at once at home. They never forgot Mrs. Gray nor did she forget them. Never robust and during much of her life an invalid, Mrs. Gray was nevertheless able to endure the fatigues of travel better than many stronger persons. She accompanied her husband twice to California and went with him to Mexico when she had reached an age at which few persons would

care to make such a journey. She also went with him to England in 1850, sailing in a packet, as the longer voyage was expected to benefit her health, and later they made several other trips to Europe, the last being in 1887 shortly before Prof. Gray's death, Jan. 30, 1888.

After her husband's death Mrs. Gray led a quiet life always interested in botanists and their work and always glad to see visiting botanists until with advancing years she was forced to live in retirement. For several years she was absorbed in the arrangement of her husband's correspondence and edited the Letters of Asa Gray, which appeared in 1893 in two volumes. The Gray Herbarium, which had become the property of Harvard University, had but slight endowment, wholly inadequate to provide for its care and development. In 1899, however, the announcement was made of an anonymous offer of \$20,000 to found an Asa Gray Professorship of Systematic Botany, a position to be united with the curatorship of the Gray Herbarium. The offer was made conditional on the raising of at least \$30,000 as a Gray Memorial Fund for the further endowment of the Gray Herbarium. The required sum was raised, but even the University authorities were in ignorance of the name of the person who had made the offer. It was Mrs. Gray, and botanists will be glad to know that it was the wife of Prof. Gray, who, by her very substantial gift, awakened the new interest and initiated the movement which has led in recent years to a much more effective endowment of the herbarium which he founded.

Mrs. Gray's last days were passed with her family, who were always devoted to her. Had she lived a month longer she would have reached her 89th year, a life as long as it was happy and useful. The funeral services were held in the old house in Cambridge and, as they departed, the friends felt not only that an old friend had been taken from them but also that the house so rich in associations with the past was closed to them forever.—W. G. F.